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HAZRAT MIRZA NASIR AHMAD
Khalifatul Masih III

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

MONTHLY

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Vol. XV—No. 6

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Editor

NUR-UD-DIN MUNEER M.A.

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FREEDOM OF FAITH AND CONSCIENCE IN ISLAM

BY

HAZRAT MIRZA NASIR AHMAD
KHALIFATUL MASIH III

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF

THE SERMONS DELIVERED

ON

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1978

AND

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12, 1979

AT RABWAH.

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THE SERMON DELIVERED on Friday, December 29, 1978, at Rabwah.

After the recitation of the Shahada, and seeking refuge with Allah and recitation of the Fatiha Hazrat Khalifatul Masih proceeded :—

From one point of view the universe created by God Al-mighty is divided into two portions. A large portion does that which it is commanded by God Almighty to do and it carries out the will of God. The other portion has been given the choice to carry out God's behest or to ignore it. This second portion is man upon whom God Almighty has conferred freedom of action.

Everything beside man carries out that which God Almighty desires it to do. The Holy Quran says concerning the angels : They do what they are commanded (66 : 7). The Promised Messiah, peace be on him, has written that from this point of view everything beside man is an angel, as it does that which it is commanded to do. The winds carry out whatever they are commanded. During a particular season the trees are commanded to shed their leaves and they do so. The fields are sometimes commanded to produce good harvests and and they do so. Sometimes God commands them : I am wroth with a certain region of the earth, then let it bring about conditions of famine, and the same region which had previously produced the means of nourishment for the people, thereupon brings about conditions of famine.

Islam is the religion of nature. So far as man is concerned the notion of compulsion in human life is inconsistent with the divine project of the universe, inasmuch as if God Almighty had imposed His will upon man there would have been no difference between man and a donkey or a tree or a stone. Islam being in accord with human nature sets forth so beautiful a teaching concernig the freedom of conscience and the freedom of belief as establishes an ideal for the world. It is not only some religions that permit compulsion in matters of faith, but several philosophic conceptions are also opposed to freedom of conscience and regard compulsion as permissible. Islam does not permit anything of the kind. Islam has established an ideal standard in respect of freedom of conscience. God Almighty has said in effect : This is the religion of nature which comprises perfect guidance. A perfect Book

has been revealed. No other teaching fulfils human needs to a greater degree, nor provides greater beneficence for man, nor discloses to man more clearly the ways that bring man nearer to God. It is Islam alone which has thrown open to man all the gates of approach to God. But Islam imposes no compulsion nor permits it. In Islam God says : I account compulsion as evil. I proclaim freedom of conscience and guarantee freedom of belief.

Reflection upon the Holy Quran reveals several aspects of this teaching. For instance, it is said : Proclaim, O Prophet, O mankind the Truth has indeed come to you from your Lord. Then whoso follows the guidance, follows it only for the good of his own self, and whoso errs does so only to his own detriment. I am not appointed a Keeper over you (10 : 109).

Here the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, has been commanded to proclaim to mankind that perfect truth has been presented to them in the Holy Quran in the form of the teachings of Islam. He who accepts it does so only to his own good and he who goes astray would do so only to his own loss. The Holy Prophet is commanded to proclaim that he is not responsible for the people. They have themselves to provide for their own good, or to earn the wrath of God Almighty. That is not his business. Every soul must bear this responsibility for itself.

It is pointed out that every path that guides to the gardens of the pleasure of God Almighty has been described in the Holy Quran. It is the business of man to tread along it of his own volition or to turn away from it of his own will. The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, bears no responsibility in that behalf, nor would he exercise any compulsion in respect of it.

Again it is said : Proclaim O Prophet : This is the truth from your Lord; then let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve. We have prepared for the wrongdoers a fire which covers them like a Canopy (18 : 30).

Here also it is put beyond doubt that the perfect truth has been revealed by God and that man is free to accept it or to reject it. But the warning is added that those who wrong themselves and do not carry out the true demands of their nature and adopt the ways that obstruct their progress and lead them away from God would deprive themselves

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of God's love and of the gardens of God's pleasure. For them a fire has been prepared within which they are confined.

These two verses have been addressed to people to whom Islam was presented for the first time. Those to whom the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, brought the message of Islam were not Muslims. They were told : This is the truth ; this is the right guidance. These are the ways of approaching God Almighty. These are the ways of the fulfilment of your natural demands. Treading along them you will become the servants of God. I invite you to them. It is for you to enter within the circle of Islam or to keep out of it. If you enter it with faith and sincerity of heart and act in accordance with it, it would be to your own good. If you do not adopt these ways and will not be ready to tread along them which will be all to your good, the loss will be yours. The ways that you adopt, other than these, would lead you away from God and will bring you to hell.

Thus every one has been told that all the doors for entering into the circle of Islam are open for him. There is no one who would obstruct his entry through those doors. The decision must be his and once he has decided he can enter freely. There is no power which would compel any one by force or threat of dagger or sword or rifle or atom bomb or hydrogen bomb to enter that circle. God does not permit it. If anyone desires to enter the circle of Islam, to accept it and to make it obligatory upon himself, no one can stop him. If someone does not desire to accept it, no one can force him. No one can make anyone a Muslim by force. This is the teaching of Islam. Many people commit mistakes but the guidance that God has set forth in the Holy Quran is clear that no power can make a person a Muslim by force.

I have indicated that the purpose of the creation of the universe would be frustrated if man were not to be bestowed the freedom that distinguishes him from the angels. Further, these verses indicate that there is no power that can obstruct anyone from entering into the circle of Islam and there is no power that can block the door of entry forbidding ingress through it. So that it is not permissible that anyone should arrogate to himself the authority to exclude by force from the circle of Islam anyone who affirms that he is a Muslim and sincerely acts according to the teaching of Islam. God Almighty has not bestow-

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ed this power upon anyone. According to Islamic teaching and the law of the Holy Quran God Almighty regards any such action as vicious and contrary to His will. These verses have clearly proclaimed that everyone is free to affirm his faith voluntarily or to proclaim his denial without restraint. No compulsion is permissible in either case. No non-Muslim can be forcibly converted to Islam, nor can any Muslim be forcibly declared a non-Muslim.

Is it open to a person who has become a Muslim to abjure Islam after having declared his faith in it? Or will he be subject to compulsion that having once recognised the Truth and the light that is contained in the Holy Quran, he is no longer at liberty to depart from Islam? Does Islam leave the door of egress open or does it close it altogether? The Holy Quran says: Many of the people of the Book, after the Truth has become manifest to them, would desire, out of sheer envy generated by their minds, that after you have believed, they could turn you into disbelieves. But do you forgive them and forbear, till Allah sends down His deeree. Surely, Allah has full power to do all that He wills. (2 : 100).

Here it is predicated that when Islam spreads far and wide it would happen at various times and in diverse regions that a group out of the people of the Book would strive, out of their envy, that you should emerge from the circle of Islam, and despite having recognised the Truth and the light you should deny them after having believed. In the text it is not expressly stated what your reaction would be or should be. But the latter portion of the verse indicates that they would make their utmost effort and would employ force to pull you out of the fold of Islam and you will resist them. Nevertheless you must not use any kind of force or compulsion against them. You should forgive them and forbear. Surely Allah has full power to do all that He wills. He will bring about a change in the juxtaposition between you.

In the beginning of Islam the Muslims were commanded that if the enemies of Islam sought, as they in fact did, to wipe out Islam by force, they were not to take up the sword in opposition to them. But then a time came when it was announced: Permission to fight is granted to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged and Allah indeed has the power to help them (22 ; 40). This meant that

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the wrong doing of the enemy having reached its extreme limit, the Muslims were permitted, for the safeguarding of the freedom of conscience and freedom of belief, to take up the sword against the sword of the enemy and to continue to wield it till freedom of conscience and freedom of belief were again firmly re-established in human society according to God's design.

In another verse it is said: They will not stop fighting you until they turn you back from your faith, if they can. The works of those from among you who turn back from their faith and die in a state of disbelief shall be vain in this world and the next. These are the inmates of the fire, therein shall they abide (2 : 218).

This means that whoever of you turns back from his faith, that is to say, whoever out of fear of the sword or being unsettled by opposition announces that he abjures Islam is an apostate.

In the idiom of Islam an apostate is not one concerning whom someone else says that he has abjured Islam. There is no mention of any such person in the Holy Quran. It says that if a person announces voluntarily that he has abjured Islam and thereafter dies in his state of disbelief, the works of such a one will be vain in this world and in the next and he will be an inmate of the fire wherein he shall abide. Thus the punishment of a person who voluntarily abjures Islam after having believed, is the same as that of a disbeliever who voluntarily abstains from accepting Islam. There is no mention here, or anywhere else of any punishment for an apostate in this world which may be inflicted by human hands, politically or administratively.

I shall now draw your attention, one by one, to all the verses of the Holy Quran in which mention is made of apostacy. It is said: Surely, those who have turned away after guidance has been made manifest to them have been deceived by Satan who has beguiled them with false hopes (47 : 26).

Here it is set out that a person who, out of weakness or misfortune, voluntarily proclaims that he abjures Islam and departs from it and thus, having entered the circle of Islam, goes out of it after having fully understood it, does so because of his having been beguiled by Satan with false hopes. He who abjures Islam relying on the false hopes held out to him by Satan and makes those hopes the basis of his conduct cannot look forward to any good from God Almighty.

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Again it is said: O ye who believe, whoso from among you turns back from his religion should remember that in his stead Allah will soon bring a people whom He will love and who will love Him, who will be kind and considerate towards the believers and firm and unyielding towards the disbelievers. They will strive hard in the cause of Allah, and striving against their own selves they will seek to mould their natures according to the pleasure of God in the light of the guidance of Islam. They will not at all take to heart the reproaches of the fault finders. Their hearts will be filled only with the fear of God. This is Allah's grace; He bestows it upon whosoever He pleases. Allah is the Lord of vast bounties, All-Knowing (5 : 55).

Again it is said: Allah will not guide those who do not believe in the Signs of Allah, and they shall have a grievous punishment; and this is followed by: Whoso disbelieves in Allah after he has believed, excepting the case of one who is forced to make a declaration of disbelief while his heart rests securely in faith, but one who opens his mind wide to disbelief, on him is Allah's wrath and he shall have a grievous punishment (16 : 105 & 107).

Here it is affirmed that faith is related to the heart and mind, for it is said: But one who opens his mind wide to disbelief. That which is related to the heart cannot be affected or changed by any material power or force. It is impossible that such power should be able to modify the conditions, feeling or emotion of the heart. The verse mentions the case of the person who denies God after having believed. A person believes in God Almighty, having comprehended the reasons in support of the truth of Islam and having observed the divine signs which establish the greatness of Muhammad, peace be on him, and yet he voluntarily affirms that he denies Muhammad, peace be on him. He is not one of those who make such an affirmation under compulsion in consequence of some weakness. But with regard to one who opens his mind wide to disbelief voluntarily after having believed and affirms that he denies God, the One and Unique, Who had sent Muhammad, peace be on him, and that he does not believe that Islam is a true religion, God Almighty says that on such a one will be His wrath and he shall have a grievous punishment. It is well known that such a punishment sometimes overtakes such an offender in this life also, but the true recompense of conduct in this life is related to the hereafter.

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Then it is said : Whoso seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the losers. How shall Allah guide a people who have disbelieved after having believed and who had borne witness that the Messenger is true and to whom clear proofs had come ? Allah guides not the wrong-doers. Of such the punishment is that on them shall be the curse of Allah and of angles and of men, all together ; thereunder shall they abide. Their punishment shall not be lightened nor shall they be granted respite ; except those who repent thereafter and amend. Surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful (3 : 86-90).

Here it is affirmed that those who disbelieve after having believed, and having observed signs and evidence that the Messenger of God is true, and has performed miracles for the establishment of Divine Unity, and who announce that they have discarded faith and have adopted the ways of disbelief, would be punished by God Almighty in the hereafter, except those of them who repent thereafter and amend in this very life. If after the affirmation of their apostacy their punishment, according to the Holy Quran, had been death, they would have had no time for repentance and amendment and this portion of the verse would have been meaningless. Thus this verse also shows that they ought to be afforded the opportunity, till their death, to repent and amend and to accept Islam and to come back into its fold and seek the forgiveness of God Almighty. If they are granted forgiveness, God, Who is Most Forgiving and Ever Merciful, would cover up their sins and forgiving them would bestow His mercy upon them and would admit them to the gardens of His Pleasure. But if a person after having believed adopts the ways of disbelief and is not granted any opportunity of repentance and amendment, that is to say, is not allowed to live out his natural life but is put to death and is deprived of the opportunity of repentance and amendment, the divine attributes of forgiveness and mercy that are mentioned in the verse would in his case be suspended and he would not be able to derive any benefit from them.

Then it is said : Those who believe, then disbelieve, then again believe, then disbelieve and thereafter go on increasing in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them nor guide them to any way of deliverance (4 : 138).

This verse proclaims that everyone has been given the choice to accept Islam of his own free will. Every door for entry into the circle of Islam is open for every person. It has also been proclaimed that it

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is possible for everyone to depart from Islam by any of the doors that provide entry into Islam and to proclaim his disbelief and his apostacy. Thus as the doors of entry into the circle of Islam were open for him, the doors of egress from Islam are also open. After he departs from Islam the question arises, is it possible for him, under the teachings of Islam, to repent and to return to Islam ? This verse lays down that if a person who has believed announces that he has turned away from Islam and denies God and the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, and six months, a year, two years, three years thereafter God Almighty provides him with the opportunity to believe once more, and having believed again he re-enters the circle of Islam there is nothing to stop him from doing so. The doors of his entry into the circle of Islam are open to him as they were open the first time. He becomes a Muslim again. If after remaining a Muslim for a year or two years or for a longer period he is again over-taken by misfortune and announces that he has turned away from Islam and denies God Almighty and the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, he is free to do so a second time, and is not subject to any restriction, for there is no compulsion ; there is freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. If he disbelieves again and goes on advancing in disbelief and does not repent, Allah would not forgive such a one nor would guide him to any way of deliverance. He would achieve no spiritual success.

Then it is said : Those who disbelieve after having believed, and deny God the One and Unique and His Most Exalted Servant and Messenger Muhammad, peace be on him, and then continue to advance in disbelief and are not able to repent, and die in their state of disbelief, their repentance would not be accepted. Those are they who have gone utterly astray (3 : 91).

The immediately following verse clears up that which had not been expressly set out in the preceding verse. It says : From anyone of those who have disbelieved and die while they are disbelievers, there shall not be accepted even an earthful of gold, though he offer it in ransom. For them there shall be a grievous punishment and they shall have no helpers (3 : 92). This makes it clear that repentance and the opening of the door of God's Mercy in this context, means repentance in this life.

The declaration of Pharaoh when he perceived that he was drowning : I believe that there is no God but He in whom the children of

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Israel believe and I submit to Him (10 : 91) was no declaration of faith or repentance. God Almighty has said : From anyone of those who have disbelieved and die while they are disbelievers there shall not be accepted even an earthful of gold though he offer it in ransom. God Almighty has mentioned this in order to emphasise that such people cannot escape the torment of hell under any circumstances.

These verses make it quite clear that Islam has guaranteed freedom of conscience and freedom of belief, and has announced in the plainest terms that so far as faith is concerned every individual is answerable to God Almighty. The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, was commanded to proclaim that he had not been apponinted a Keeper over the people nor had he been made responsible for them. No one has been made responsible for another's faith. Everyone is responsible for himself. No one can be compelled to become a Muslim nor can anyone be expelled from Islam by compulsion. No one can be forced to perform the Salat nor can anyone be forcibly restrained from performing it. No one can be compelled to remember God or to refrain from doing so. No one can be stopped from repeating the name of Allah or from proclaiming His Greatness or from affirming the Credo : There is no god beside Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah ; no one can be restrained from supplicating the divine in the words taught by the Holy Quran.

There is no compulsion whatever in Islam. So far as the Holy Quran is concerned there is no text, no verse, not a single word that prescribes any worldly, political or administrative punishment for apostacy. There have, however, been in our history incidents in which a person became an apostate, murdered Muslims and was guilty of armed rebellion. All over the world a murderer forfeits his life, and armed rebellion is put down with the use of force. If a person or a group is guilty of apostacy, that is to say, voluntarily announces his or its repudiation of Islam, and voluntarily takes up the swords to kill the Muslims and voluntarily, without any compulsion, murders Muslims and is punished with death for murder or is suppressed by the sword, it does not at all mean that he or it is put to death because of his or its voluntary repudiation of Islam. The penalty for the offences committed by such people, irrespective of their apostacy, is death. In such a case it cannot be said that they are punished for their apostacy. Their punishment would have been the same even if there had been no question of apostacy.

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It is a clear and acknowledged verity that the Holy Quran is a complete and perfect Book. There is no shortcoming in it for the making up of which we have to have recourse to some historical event or to some uncertain *hadees*. Therefore, the Ahmadiyya community believes that all the directions and admonitions of the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, are illustrative of some direction or other of the Holy Quran and there is no direction of the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, which is inconsistent with the Holy Quran or which adds to it or makes up any shortcoming in it. There can be no greater offence than to charge the Holy Prophet, who was an excellent exemplar for the whole world with having failed to act in accordance with some directive of the Holy Quran and having urged others to refrain from acting upon it. You, who are the members of the Ahmadiyya Movement, should understand clearly that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a true lover of his Lord. So much did he love his Lord that he lost himself wholly in Him and that is why we believe that Muhammad, peace be on him, was a perfect manifestation of divine attributes. His life illustrates the degree of majesty and glory that he attributed to the Holy Quarn. There is no direction of the Holy Quran that he did not illustrate in action and there is no prohibition which he contravened. He was a perfect exemplar, a pure and holy personage who illustrated every direction of the Holy Quran in action. We Ahmadis cannot imagine for one moment that he may have said something inconsistent with the Holy Quran or something that is not to be found in it. The Holy Quran has provided us with such beautiful teachings on freedom of conscience and freedom of belief as furnish an example for all other religions and for all their thinkers who have invented all sorts of isms.

Freedom of conscience and freedom of belief are the fundamental rights of man. His very creation is for that purpose. If man is not free in respect of these matters, if people are to be driven forcibly into Islam like sheep and goats, then there can be no recompense by God, the One and Unique, for any human action. Will you compel God Almighty to accept the hypocritical actions of people performed by them under compulsion so that God Himself must love them under compulsion? Would you force some one to declare himself a Muslim and assure him that though his heart is not convinced of the truth of Islam, yet if he performs the Salat for show, God would reward him for it and would not be aware

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of his hypocisy and the true condition of his heart? God affirms that He is fully aware of the secrets of your hearts and yet you think that He would be unaware of all this. If He is aware of it how would He reward such hypocritical action beneficently? On the other hand, if a person's heart is filled with sincere faith and devotion and with perfect understanding of God and His attributes and loves Muhammad, peace be on him, and out of that love he obeys God Almighty and worships Him, and all the powers of the world combine in the declaration that he is expelled from Islam and that God would not deal with him out of love and would not bestow upon him the best recompense for his righteous actions, would God be compelled to accept and act upon their verdict? Indeed not. Those who submit to Him sincerely and with perfect goodwill will continue to win His love, let the world say what it will and think what it will. Keep supplicating, therefore, that God Almighty should not let Satan create any doubt in our minds and that our devotion and our worship may not be tainted with show or hypocrisy. If our hearts are truly inspired by the love of God and have an understanding of His Unity; if we perform the Salat because God commands us to perform it; if we eat because God directs us to eat; if we behave beneficently towards our spouses because He has so commanded and has taught us that the first school for the instruction and exercise of love is the home; if everyone of our actions results from our intense desire to act according to God's will, and our restraining ourselves from vice is the result of our fear of God, we must look to God for our recompense. We shall not extend a begging bowl towards any person for winning heavenly bounties. May God Almighty include us among His sincere servants and keep us firm along this path and may He not let any single one of us to be one of those who having recognised the guidance and having believed, then departed from it.

We esteem ourselves Muslims; we are Muslims. We have never thought of departing from Islam. We deem it a curse that our tongues should say that we are not Muslims, that we have abandoned God and that (God save us) we do not believe in Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him. It is not possible that we should depart from the light and the truth with which this world is illumined, and which we have seen with our own eyes and so flounder in darkness. It is true, however, that man is weak and cannot achieve God's mercy and His

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blessing without His support and grace. Continue to supplicate that you may remain secure in the citadel of the mercy of God Almighty and that His angels should continue to safeguard you against going astray and that every moment you should win the love of God. Nothing more is needed.

THE SEQUEL TO THIS SERMON DELIVERED on Firday January 12, 1979 at Rabwah

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After the recitation of the Shahadah and seeking refuge with Allah and recitation of the Fatiha he proceeded :-

Muhammad, peace be on him, occupies the highest station in both worlds. Concerning him God said: Were it not for thee I would not have created the universe. The law that was revealed to him is complete and perfect. This law sets out human rights clearly and also safeguards them. The goal of human life is to win the love of God by treading alone the path indicated by God Almighty. The purpose of all the commandments of the Holy Quran is to win the pleasure of God.

The Holy Quran affirms that the true station of man is established by his being bestowed perfect freedom of faith and perfect freedom of conscience by God Almighty. The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, was furnished guidance in this context and his station was also clearly expounded.

I shall now place before you several verses in illustration of this topic, namely, that the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, was raised so that man's freedom of faith and freedom of conscience may be guaranteed, and man, by carrying out divine commandments in freedom, of his own will and volition, and being overcome by the love of God Almighty should devote himself to, and offer himself as a sacrifice in, the cause of Allah; and that affirming: I submit myself wholly to the Lord of the worlds; should present himself before God Almighty for sacrifice as a sheep submits itself for slaughter to the butcher, with this difference that the sheep is under compulsion and man is completely free.

God has said: Thy people have rejected the message We have sent through thee, though it is the Truth. Tell them: I am not appointed a guardian over you (6 : 67). The Arabic expression Vakil, employed in this verse, means guardian, watchman, one with authority to restrain from

vice forcibly. I have collated a few references to the commentaries which make it clear that eminent divines in the past had clearly grasped this connotation and set it forth in plain words.

One commentator has said : Vakil means he who safeguards. This verse sets forth ; I am not your guardian ; in the sense that I have not been authorised to force you to accept the Message that I have brought. and that you should proclaim your faith in it. I am only a Warner. Having conveyed the Message to you clearly I have discharged my responsibility. If you deny the Message, God will be wroth with you and you would witness that of which I am warning you. God will call you to account for your denial (*Tafseer Ruhul Bayan Vol. III P. 48*).

Another eminent commentator has written : The verse means : I have not been appointed a guardian over you so that I should punish you or call you to account for your rejection of the Message I have brought you, and your turning away from the reasons that have been clearly expounded to you. It is not my function to punish you and to chastise you. I am but a warner. It is Allah who will call you to account and punish you. That is not my function (*Tafseer Kabir of Imam Razi Vol. IV P. 65*).

In another commentary Vakil has been interpreted as meaning : I have not been appointed that I should perform your duty in your place. It is your business to listen to the reasons, reflect upon them and to accept them and to partake of their blessings. I have not been authorised to force you to do this. It is your business and you have to do it ; I have not been appointed to supervise your conduct so that I may punish you. I am but a warner and I have left out nothing in warning you. To Allah, the Holy One, pertains calling you to account. My function is only to convey the Message and to warn you. Zujaj has said : The meaning is that the Holy Prophet was not commanded that if his Message was rejected he should go to war over it to force people to believe and to compel them by the sword to submit. He was not commanded to take up the sword and to stop the disbelievers from rejecting the Truth (*Tafseer Ruhul Maani Vol III, Part VII P. 182*).

Ibn Jarir has interpreted the verse as meaning : God Almighty says: Tell them, O Muhammad : I am not a guardian or a watchman over you. I am but a Messenger of God who has charged me to convey to

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you the verities that God Almighty has sent down to me for your benefit.

In the commentary Al-Manaar, of Muhammad Abduhu, published in 1928 by Muhammad Rasheed Raza, the verse is interpreted as meaning: Tell them, O Prophet: I have not been appointed a guardian (an authoritative officer) over you. I have been sent only as a Messenger.

He says: Vakil means one who is placed in charge of the affairs of another. Such appointment carries authority and force with it. Thus if a ruler appoints someone as his representative, or as governor of a province or as a manager of an estate, he would have authority from the ruler to exercise compulsion over the people in respect of their mistakes and defaults, but a Messenger is not appointed by God to punish. God has reserved that for Himself. A Messenger is charged with conveying the Message which God Almighty sends down to him for the people. He admonishes the people and teaches them and gives them glad tidings that if they would follow the guidance they would become the recipients of God's bounties, and warns them that if they would turn away God would be wroth with them and they would be seized by Him. He establishes the religion of Allah among the people through his admonition and teaching and glad tidings and warnings. This is his function. He is not a representative of his Lord Who sends him, in the sense that he is authorised to reward or punish on behalf of God. This is not the function of the Messenger nor is he bestowed such power by God Almighty. Had he been authorised to punish or to discipline, God Almighty would have bestowed upon him the power to do so, whereas we know that he passed the whole period of his prophethood in Mecca as an oppressed person. He adds that the Holy Prophet had not been bestowed power by his Lord to rule over his people like God and to compel them to believe, that is to say, to believe and to continue to believe and to act in accordance with the belief. Thus there is neither permission to compel nor the power to do so. He cannot force people to act contrary to their inclinations.

He has cited several verses in support of his thesis. He construes: There shall be no compulsion in religion (2 : 257); as both laying down a principle and as a command addressed to the Holy Prophet, peace be on him. Thus the Holy Prophet was directed that he was not to exercise compulsion in matters of religion; he was to admonish for he

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was but an admonisher (88 : 22) and had no authority to compel people (88 : 23). This has been interpreted as meaning that the Holy Prophet had not been set in authority over people to compel them to carry out his will and to accept that which he believed to be the truth. He then cites : We know well what they say, and thou hast not been appointed a despot over them. So admonish, by means of the Quran him who fears warning (50 : 46). The Holy Prophet had no responsibility with regard to those who did not fear God's warning. God well knew all that they said in refutation. Then it is said : Thou art not charged with guiding them to the right path ; it is Allah who guides whomso-ever He pleases (2 : 273). He then says that Vakil connotes a guardian to whom God may have committed the authority to punish creatures for their sins.

I have set out in detail the connotation of the word *Vakil* that is used in the verse that I had cited (6 : 67). The purport of that verse is that God Almighty has not committed to the Holy Prophet the divine authority whereby God rewards the doers of good and punishes the doers of evil. The Holy Prophet's function is to convey to the people God's Message, His teaching and His perfect law which is comprised in the Holy Quran and has been communicated to man through him.

At another place it is said : Had Allah so willed, they would not have set up partners with Him. We have not appointed thee a keeper over them, nor art thou their guardian (6 : 108). This verse is preceded by : Proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord : So he who comprehends them, it is for his own benefit, and he who ignores them, does so to his own loss. Tell them : I am not appointed a guardian over you (6 : 105). This is followed by : Follow that which has been revealed to thee from thy Lord ; there is no God but He ; and turn aside from those who set up partners with Allah (6 : 107) Part of that which had been revealed to the Holy Prophet was that his responsibility was to convey to mankind that with which he had been entrusted and that it was not open to him to take upon himself that which belonged to God. He was to turn away from those who persisted in associating partners with God. Thus a tremendous truth was set forth, strong proofs of the Unity of God were furnished, man was shown the way whereby he could establish a living relationship with God and recognise his Lord

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through his experience. Despite all this, concerning him who persists in associating partners with Allah it is only said : Turn away from him. Then it is said : Had Allah so willed, they would not have set up partners with Him. We have not appointed thee a Keeper over them nor art thou their guardian.

Then it is said : your Lord knows you best. If He pleases He will have mercy on you and if He pleases He will chastise you. We have not sent thee to be a keeper over them (17 : 55) This is preceded by the reminder that Satan is man's declared enemy and tries to lead man astray from the path of God. Then follows the verse that God knows best those whose hearts rebel against Him and those who submit humbly to Him and accept the teaching revealed to Muhammad, peace be on him. Man can have no knowledge of this. Whether a person truly loves God is known only to Him. No one else can disclose it. Your Lord knows you best. If He pleases He will have mercy on you, that is to say, He will have mercy on him concerning whom He knows that he deserves mercy and if He so wills He will chastise you. The Holy Prophet is told : We have not appointed you a keeper over them.

At another place it is said : Say to them : O my people, carry on, on your side ; I shall carry on, on my side ; when God manifests His design and you are called to account, and the believers are bestowed favours, you will realise which side is afflicted with a degrading and abiding punishment. We have revealed to thee the Book, comprising truth and wisdom for the benefit of mankind. Then whoever follows the guidance truly does so to his own good ; and whoever goes astray does so to his own loss. Thou art not appointed a guardian over them (39 : 40-42). Thus even the Holy Prophet himself is not a Keeper or guardian over the people. It would, therefore, be the height of stupidity for anyone to claim that he has been appointed a gurdian over the people and God has bestowed upon him authority to compel people to accept Islam and to continue to adhere to it.

At another place it is said: Allah will keep a record of the doings of those who have taken protectors beside Him. Thou hast not been appointed a guardian over them (42 : 7). This means that it is for God Almighty to safeguard their actions and to call them to account if He so wills. This is followed by the verse: Thus have We revealed the Quran to thee in Arabic, that thou mayest warn the people of the central township of the land and those around it; and that thou

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mayest warn them of the Day of Gathering, of which there is no doubt, when God will judge between the people out of His majesty and glory and everyone will realise whether he is among those for whom the gates of the Garden have been opened or is of those who will be driven to the blazing fire (42 : 8).

At another place it is said: Those who disbelieve in the Truth make fun of thee and say: Is this the one whom Allah has chosen as His Messenger out of all others? He had well nigh beguiled us away from our gods, had we not adhered to them steadily. When they behold the punishment they shall realise who was most astray from the right path (25:42-43). This is followed by : Hast thou considered the case of one who has made his own evil inclination his god? Canst thou be a guardian over him to force him into ways of righteousness (25 : 44)? To day it has become a fashion throughout the world, Europe, America and Socialist and Communist countries, that their own inclinations have become their gods. Some of them have proclaimed that their public is their god. God Almighty has here said that He had not bestowed upon anyone the authority to force them away from their inclinations.

Commenting on this verse Ibn Jarir has said that it means: O Muhammad have We appointed you guardian over one who makes his evil inclinations his god (Tafseer Ibn Jarir Vol. XIX p 11)? According to Arabic idiom such interrogation amounts to a negation; that is to say, God has not appointed Muhammad as guardian over such a person.

The Commentary Ruhul Bayan interprets this verse as meaning that God has not appointed the Holy Prophet a guardian who should hold back people from Polytheism and from sins. God has here told the Holy Prophet: I have not committed to thee the function of safeguarding such people against paganism and sins. They are free to act as they wish ; thy business is only to warn. It is for them to accept or to reject. Thy business is only to tell them that the Unity of God is the foundation of the Universe, and to furnish them with reasons and signs and miracles, meaning by miracles something which reason cannot explain except by saying that God had so determined. It is not thy business to safeguard them against polytheism. Thus it was not the responsibility of the Holy Prophet that people should not set up partners with Allah and should not commit sins.

Razi in his Tafseer Kabir has said that this verse means: Thou

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hast not been appointed a guardian over such a person to prevent him from following his inclination. We have not so directed thee, nor have We given thee the power or the authority or made thee a guardian over them so that thou mayest safeguard them against following their evil desires. This is the same as has been said at another place: Thou art not appointed a guardian over them, that is to say, thou hast not been appointed to force them to conform to what thou mayest will, namely, to accept the light and the truth that thou hast seen. Thou art not appointed to compel anyone to believe as God has said : Thou art not appointed a despot over them: and has said: There is no compulsion in religion, meaning: Muhammad, you are not at liberty to compel anyone to follow the Truth (Tafseer Kabir of Imam Razi Vol. VI p. 478)

God Almighty has used the expression Keeper or Guardian negatively with reference to the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, that is to say, the Holy Prophet was not appointed a Keeper or a guardian over people to compel them to believe. It may be asked then what had God made the Holy Prophet ? God says: I have made thee My Messenger, a bearer of glad tidings that those who believe and work righteousness and win the love of God would be bestowed great bounties (and you are witnesses how grand those bounties can be), and a warner that those who rouse the wrath of God would burn in the fire of His wrath.

I have made thee My Messenger; means that the Holy Prophet's responsibility was to convey to people the teaching that God had revealed for the benefit of man. Therefore the second expression that I have chosen from the Holy Quran for the illustration of the concept of freedom of faith and freedom of conscience is Al-Balagh (conveying the message).

The Holy Quran says: Now if they should dispute with thee, tell them : I have submitted myself wholly to Allah, and also those who follow me. Say to those who have been given the Book and to those to whom no revelation has hitherto been vouchsafed : Do you submit yourselves to Allah also ? Then if they also submit to the Lord of the worlds, they will surely be rightly guided ; but if they turn away, thy duty is only to convey the Message. Allah is Watchful of His servants (3 : 21). Nothing is hidden from Him. He would deal with them and would chastise them when He wills. Here, as the context shows, the non-Muslims are addressed to whom Islam is presented for the first time. They are contesting and are told :

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We have believed and have become Muslims. Do you also become Muslims and you will thereby win God's pleasure, His love, His blessings and His mercies.

Again it is said : O ye who believe, liqour, gambling, idols and divining arrows are but abominations and Satanic devices. So turn wholly away from each one of them so that you may prosper. Satan desires only to create enmity and hatred between you by means of liqour and gambling and to keep you back from the rememberance of Allah and from Prayer. Will you, then, desist ? Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and be ever on your guard ; but if you turn away then remember the duty of our Messenger is only to convey Our Message clearly (5 : 91-93). These verses are obviously addressed to the Muslims. In this context turning away has two connotations. One turning away is to adopt the ways of hypocrisy, disobedience and misconduct instead of the ways of faith and sincerity ; and another turning away is to declare unwillingness and refusal to carry out these injunctions and to repudiate Islam, as a great part of the Arabs of the desert after the death of the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, repudiated Islam on account of their unwillingness to pay the *Zakat*. Recently a European became a Muslim and contravened the Islamic injunction relating to marriage. When he was told that his action was not permissible according to Islam, he repudiated Islam as a harsh religion whose injunctions he was not willing to carry out. Thus in this verse turning away comprises both hypocrisy and disobedience, and an open declaration of departure from Islam. The Verse affirms that in either case the Holy Prophet has no authority to compel you to continue within the fold of Islam or to compel you to conform to its injunctions and to act righteously. His only responsibility is to expound our Message clearly to you, and that responsibility he is carrying out.

Imam Razi has commented on this verse that it contains a great warning and a severe admonition from God Almighty. It sets out that if you turn away, then remember that the Messenger has fulfilled his responsibility by conveying the Message to you plainly and clearly. To act according to it or to ignore it is your responsibility and not that of the Messenger. The responsibility laid upon the Messenger by Us that he should warn you and should convey glad tidings to you and should expound divine verities to you plainly and clearly he has carried out, and he has thereby discharged the duty laid upon him and has been freed from his obligation. Thereafter he is not to be blamed

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in any way. Anything beyond it, that is to say, the chastisement of people who fail to discharge their responsibilities after this warning and these glad tidings, and their opposition to them or their repudiation of Islam belongs to God Almighty. That is not the function of the Messenger. The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, having expounded everything to you plainly and clearly has fulfilled the purpose for which he was sent. It is not his business to compel you to believe and to work righteousness and to keep you within the circle of the faith and to forbid you repudiating Islam.

Ibn Jarir has commented on this verse: Understand well that the responsibility of the one whom We have sent to you as a Messenger for the purpose of warning you is confined to conveying to you the teaching that is revealed to him. That teaching expounds to you the way of truth and righteousness, the way that you are commanded to follow. That is the way by following which you will find God. By pointing out that way the Messenger has discharged his responsibility. The Holy Quran is revealed to him. He has conveyed it to you clearly. He has shown you great signs in support of his truth which extend unto the day of judgment. (In this fourteenth century of the Hegira scores of signs have been exhibited by God Almighty in support of the truth of the Holy Prophet, which had been indicated in advance). The Messenger has clearly indicated to you the straight path which you have been commanded to follow. So far as the chastisement of turning away and of departing from Islam (and sinfulness) is concerned it rests with Him Who sent the Messenger and not with the Messenger. This is a severe admonition for him who turns away from His commandment and disregards His prohibitions.

Then it is said: Remember that Allah is Severe in punishment and that Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful. The Messenger's duty is only to convey the Message; and Allah knows your overt actions, as well as your secret designs (5 : 99-100). Thus the duty of the Messenger is only to convey the Message. Allah knows well that which you do and that which you design but you have not yet done; so far as recompense or chastisement is concerned He will deal with you Himself. The Messenger has no responsibility beyond conveying the Truth plainly and expounding it to you clearly.

Imam Razi interprets these verses as follows: Allah begins by warning that he is Severe in punishment and by cheering that He is also Most

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Forgiving, Ever Merciful, and then follows up with setting out the responsibility of the Messenger, namely that his duty is only to convey the Message plainly. When he expounds the Truth plainly to everyone he thereby fulfils his responsibility and is not open to any blame. The rest is your responsibility. God says: I am well aware of all your overt acts and covert designs. If you oppose the Truth by your tongue or your heart or your conduct, then remember that though you are free to do so God's seizure is severe, but if you follow the Truth that is expounded to you and tread upon the paths of winning the love of God which have been pointed out to you and obey Allah, then know that Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful.

In the Holy Quran it is expounded that God Almighty created man, bestowed upon him ears with which to hear, eyes with which to observe miracles and signs, mind with which to reflect and ponder, and sent down numberless bounties from heaven and thus demonstrated His greatness so that man should become obedient to Him; and this is followed up with: Yet, if they turn away, thy duty is only to convey the Message clearly (16 : 83). If having ears and eyes and heart, and despite numberless bounties, people should turn away, there would be no blame upon the Holy Prophet for his responsibility is to convey the Message clearly.

Again it is said: Tell them: Obey Allah and obey the Messenger. If you turn away, then he is responsible for that with which he is charged, and you are responsible for that, with which you are charged. If you obey him, you will be rightly guided. The Messenger is responsible only for conveying the Message clearly (24:55). In this verse the weak Muslims and the hypocrites are addressed and turning away comprehends both disobedience and apostacy. The responsibility of the Messenger is only to convey the Message clearly. The responsibility of those addressed is to believe, to declare their faith by word, to confirm it by their heart and to illustrate it by their actions and conduct. If they obey and become true Muslims they would be rightly guided and would prosper both in this world and in the hereafter. The duty of the Messenger is only to convey the Message clearly.

Again it is said: If you reject that whieh I urge upon you, that is nothing new, for people before you also rejected the Truth. The Messenger's responsibility is only to convey the Message clearly (29 : 19). It is not his duty to compel you to believe.

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At another place it is said: Hearken to the Truth which the Prophet has brought to you in the form of God's Word and God's Law, for it is God's design that you should believe and make progress and achieve the purpose of life. Then, if they should turn away, We have not sent thee as a guardian over them. Thy duty is only to convey the Message and no more (42 : 48, 49).

Then it is said: Believe in Allah and His Messenger and in the light that we have sent down.....Allah will remove the ills of those who believe in Allah and work righteousness, and will admit them to the gardens of His love, but those who disbelieve will be driven into the Fire.....Allah will guide aright the heart of whoever truly believes in Him, that is to say, will bestow upon him true faith which will enter into his heart and bring about a great revolution in his life. You can be bestowed this bounty only if you obey Allah and His Messenger and offer Him all that belongs to you, but if you turn away, whether on account of hypocrisy or disobedience, or by way of apostacy, then remember that the Messenger has no responsibility for your misconduct, nor does any blame rest upon him or his followers for your apostacy. The only responsibility of Our Messenger is to convey the Message clearly (64 : 9-13).

Again it is said: Whether We bring to pass during thy life-time some of the chastisement that We have designed for them, or whether we cause thee to die before that happens, it will all be fulfilled and thou will come to know about it. Thy duty is only to convey Our Message. It is for Us to call them to account (13 : 41) Here God Almighty has clearly affirmed that the responsibility of the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, is to convey the Message; the reckoning rests with God. Then who can claim that he has the authority to call anyone to account?

Imam Razi has commented on this verse as follows: God says it is all the same whether the promise of chastisement is fulfilled in thy life or after thy death. It is not the Holy Prophet who prophesied the doom of the disbelievers, nor did he prophesy the reward of the believers. Both pertain to God Almighty. It is not the function of the Holy Prophet to affirm that a sincere and devoted believer would be favoured by God, nor to affirm that he who disbelieves and opposes and associates others with God and is disobedient and turns away from God and makes Him wroth, would be afflicted with torment. This pertains

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only to God and not to any human being. God Almighty says : We prophesied and We shall fulfil Our prophecy at its due time. Thou art not responsible for it. Thy responsibility is to convey the commands of God Almighty and to discharge His trust and His message. The Holy Prophet is the chief of Prophets and his function is to convey and propagate the Message that has been entrusted to him. It is for God to call people to account. The commentary on this verse in *Ruhul Bayan* is even more explicit. It says : The Holy Prophet's duty is only to convey the Message and to discharge his trust and nothing more. He has discharged his trust, that is to say, the conveying of the Holy Quran in its entirety without the slightest change, so perfectly that there can be no addition to it or detraction from it till the Day of Judgment. It is a Book completely safeguarded. God Almighty had made a promise through the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, and made him the means of fulfilling His promise. His duty is to convey the Message and to discharge the trust and nothing more. God Almighty says that calling people to account and to chastise them for their sins on the Day of Judgment rests with Him and not with the Holy Prophet or any one else. If any one turns away this should not trouble the Holy Prophet nor should he desire to hasten the chastisement of the disobedient ones. God would inflict the chastisement at its due time according to His perfect wisdom. It is also stated in *Ruhul Bayan* that *Attaveelatun Najmiyyah* mentions that calling to account does not mean only punishment for denial but also reward for acceptance (*Ruhul Bayan* Vol. IV P. 338)

The commentary *Ruhul Maani* interprets this verse as follows: Thy duty is to convey the commandments that We have sent down to thee together with the promises of reward and the warnings of chastisement... It is for Us to call them to account for their evil conduct and to punish them for it, without forcing them into thy obedience or by exhibiting the signs which they demand from thee (*Ruhul Maani* Part XIII P. 172)

Here it is stated that even God Almighty will not force anyone to follow Muhammad, peace be on him, inasmuch as that which is done under compulsion merits neither reward nor punishment. That is why birds and animals and stones and diamonds and jewels are neither rewarded nor punished. The occasion for reward or punishment arises only where there is freedom of conscience and of belief. It stands to reason that if God's Messenger points out that a certain course of conduct is good in

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the estimation of God, a person would be entitled to ask what would he gain if he acts in conformity to it; or if a course of conduct is evil in the estimation of God what retribution should he fear in case of indulgence in it. God Almighty says that He too would not force anyone to believe in the Holy Prophet, but would call them to account and punish them for their denial. He would not exhibit such miracles either as they demand. He is God and is not subordinate to anyone, nor does He compel anyone. The basis of the whole project of the creation of man is freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. That is why it is said: I have created men, high and low, that they may worship Me (51 : 57); that is to say, man has been created so that through his voluntary effort he should become a manifestation of divine attributes and thus become a servant of God. It would be contrary to the purport of this verse to designate as God's servants those who by their nature are bound to carry out whatever they are commanded. For instance, angels carry out all God's commands and yet they are not in any way rewarded for doing so. It is their nature to obey, therefore, there is no occasion for reward or punishment for them. Reward and punishment are related to perfect freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. This has been very clearly and explicitly expounded by God Almighty in this Great Book, the Holy Quran

I have cited several verses in the course of my two sermons, that of 29th December and of today, but this does not mean that there are not other verses in the Holy Quran to the same effect. The Holy Quran itself has said that it expounds different matters in diverse aspects so that the true purport may be completely understood and grasped. I consider, however that these two sermons will make it clear to every sensible person what the Islamic teaching on this subject is.

So this is the teaching the beauty of which had won the heart of the Arabs. Was it compulsion that won over those who had subjected the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, and his compainons to the extreme of persecution over thirteen years? Was the announcement of the Holy Prophet on the day of the fall of Mecca: No blame shall lie on you this day; an announcement of compulsion or of love and freedom? It meant that he forgave them and thereby illustrated the verity that it is God who rewards and punishes and that he himself would exact no retribution from them. Those who had endured every type of persecution gave up all claim to recompense and left their properties in the hands

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of those who had taken possession of them. They went back to Medina without claiming a single brick.

These things cannot be achieved through compulsion, nor does Islam permit compulsion. The Holy Quran has clearly expounded that in its beautiful teaching no one is under compulsion, to adopt or to reject the ways that lead to God. He who adopts the ways that bear the footmarks of Muhammad, peace be on him, would arrive where he had arrived, that is to say, in the lap of his beneficent Lord. He who turns away from those ways and adopts the ways of Satan which God has forbidden, cannot be called to account by me or by anyone else, nor has this authority been committed, as is affirmed by the Holy Quran, to Muhammad, peace be on him. God has said that this pertains to Him and He would do as He wills. You should continue to perform that which is committed to you.

May God Almighty enable us to perform carefully, diligently, cheerfully, lovingly and devotedly that which He has committed to us as servants of Muhammad, peaee be on him, namely to win the whole world for Muhammad, peace be on him, so that when we have performed it in such manner as wins God's approval we may become heirs to the great bounties and blessings of God Almighty.

هُوَ الشَّافِی!

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